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ANIMAL-PAINTING AS A SPECIALTY

BY CLARENCE COOK

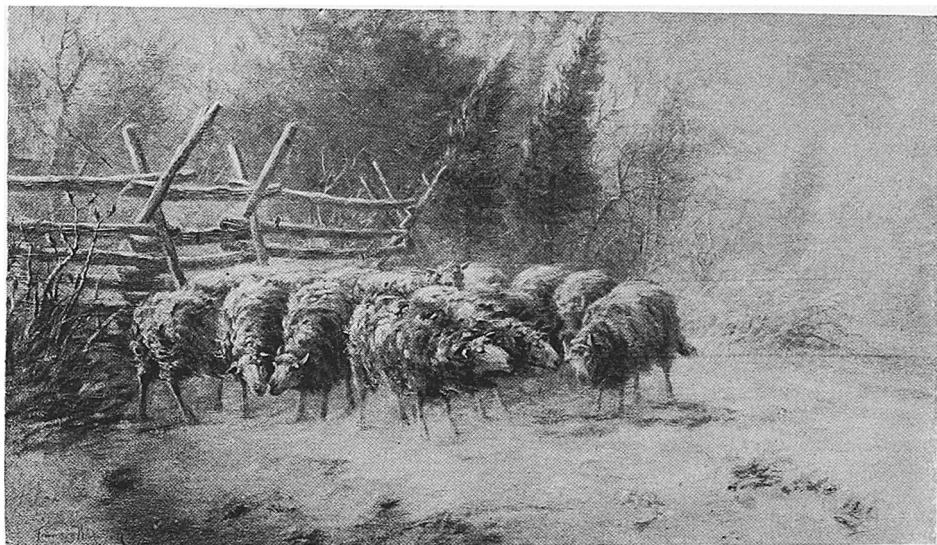
With original illustrations by Francis Wheaton.

LANDSCAPE-PAINTING, genre-painting, animal-painting—if we do not owe them all, or entirely, to the Dutch of the Seventeenth century, that race of art-loving barbarians certainly gave them a fresh impulse: starting them off on a new road. In Italy, landscape-painting and animal-painting were, for a long period, mere episodes or adjuncts to religious pictures, and the latter scenes of domestic life were the pictures in which the Virgin and the Saints acted their idyllic drama. The Italian artists found in these legendary stories ample room for whatever fancy they might have had for painting familiar subjects: a gambling-scene was no less a gambling-scene because the men engaged in it were the victims of a saint's rebuke; and a richly furnished room, with a number of women of rank visiting a mother with her new-born child, was, to the unconcerned spectator, only a noble "Interior with Figures," albeit the scene represented was "The Birth of the Virgin Mary." Among a people as religious as the Italians, there would be plenty of play for the treatment of a great variety of familiar topics without leaving the Bible.

Animal-painting was not so easily come by, and, besides the fact that the religious stories gave little opportunity for the introduction of animals, Italian cattle are not in general attractive to the eye, nor likely to interest a painter by beauty of form or color. Among the later Italians there were few who showed more than a moderate degree of skill in painting animals. They did best with the horse, but

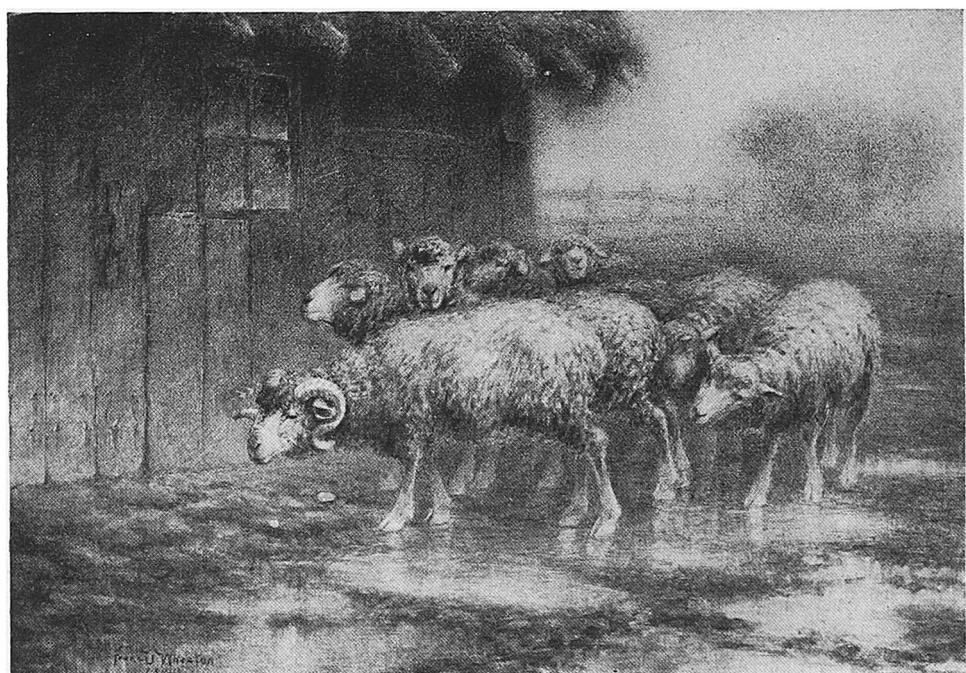


GUIDING THE FLOCK



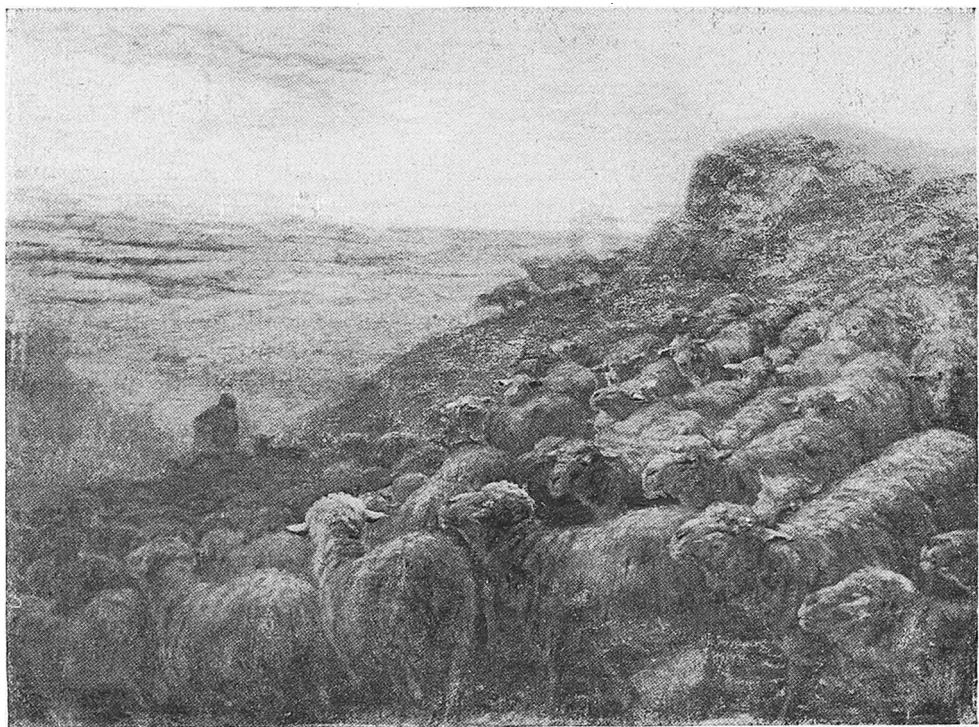
WOW! BUT IT BLOWS!

they treated him rather as a splendid incident in their pictured story, and as making, with his richly caparisoned rider, a noble piece of decoration. The Bible offered few opportunities for the introduction of animals into pictures; and from the beginning, the Italian painters seized the opportunity given by the Adoration of the Wise Men to introduce the camel, but their success with this exotic beast was



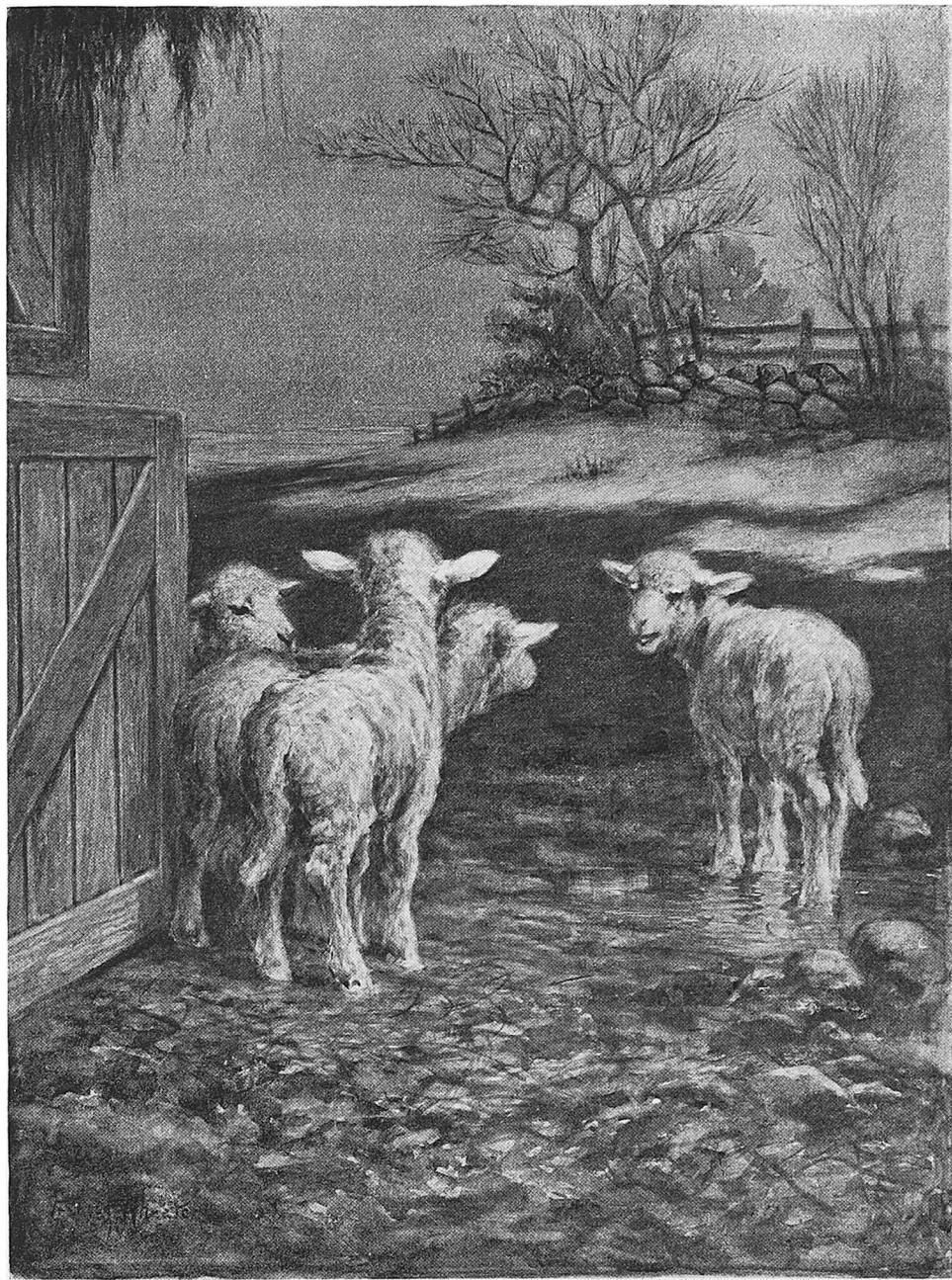
PLEASE LET US IN OUT OF THE WET

only moderate: in the best pictures he is a queer compound of a horse and a donkey. Benozzo Gozzoli, however, in the picturesque painting of this subject with which he has covered the walls of the Riccardi Chapel in Florence as with a rich tapestry, introduces no camel, but, beside the horses the three kings are riding on, and the big hunting-dogs that course beside them, we have two cheetahs or hunting-leopards, one on the ground, one mounted on the saddle of his master, and a monkey on the saddle of another rider. There are, of course, hawks, as this is really a hunting-party, however disguised as a religious procession, and one of these has caught a rabbit, and is tearing it to pieces. But all these animals, though well enough represented according to the art of the time, are introduced only as parts of the whole subject: they are not expected to receive very much notice.



STUDY FOR "THE FLOCKS DESCENDING"

The same may be said of the only other animal-representations familiar to Italian art, and to the early religious art of the rest of Europe—the ox and ass, universally, and without exception so far as I have observed, introduced into pictures of the Nativity. It is seldom that more is seen of the two animals than their heads, and the artist has seldom employed more skill in painting these than was necessary to our understanding for what they are meant. They serve chiefly as symbols of the fact that the child Jesus was born in a stable, and they are present as well when that stable is mystically represented as part of the ruined temple, and the child is cradled in the hollowed surface of its rejected corner-stone, as when the scene is a veritable stable with a broken roof, through whose chinks the day-star sheds a cheerful ray, and the holy child's couch is the traditional manger.

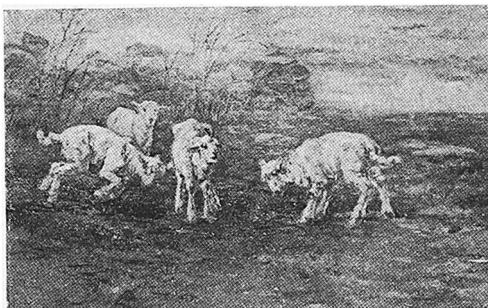


THEIR FIRST VIEW OF THE COLD WORLD

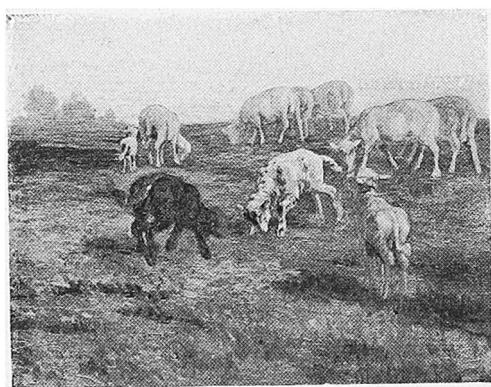
But, as Holland gave us landscape-art, and pictures of domestic and social life for their own sakes, dissevered from all religious or even historical association, so she was to give us cattle-pieces where we were to admire the cows and bulls of her fat meadows for their own beauty of form and color, and not for their aid in telling a story. If Paul Potter's "Young Bull" was not the first cattle-piece given us

by the Dutch, it may at any rate be allowed to stand as the picture that emphasized the fact of the birth of a new art.

It is true that it has not gained in esteem with the passing of years and the increase of knowledge, as the great landscape of Titian's "Peter Martyr" was doing at the time of its stupid destruction, nor has it even held its own as a work of art; it is virtually



A STUDY FOR THE PICTURE, "A PEACE-MAKER"



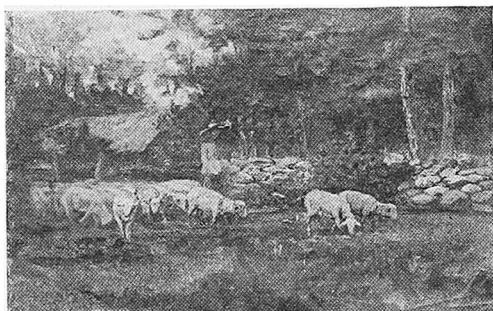
LAMBS AND SHEEP: A STUDY

to nothing better than portraiture.

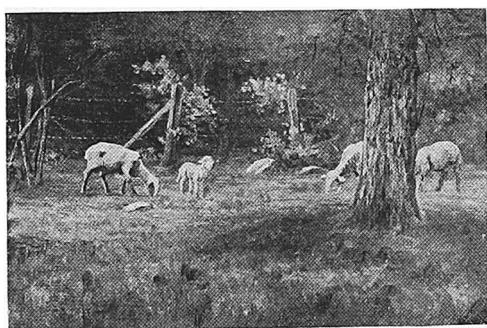
Here at home we have produced several painters of animals who have earned a place among the best of those in Europe: and the artist whose name stands at the head of this paper is not the least deserving of the group. Francis Wheaton not only paints sheep and lambs with knowledge, but he has the skill to make them behave themselves in interesting ways. It may not be

relegated to the position of a curiosity, though it will long be looked upon with respect for the part it has played in the history of the art of painting.

To-day, animal-painting is an art by itself, as distinct as landscape-painting, historical painting, or portrait-painting. In every country of Europe there are animal-painters who will leave their names to other times as admirable painters of cattle, sheep, horses, and dogs; painters who know how to give an artistic value to what may easily degenerate in-



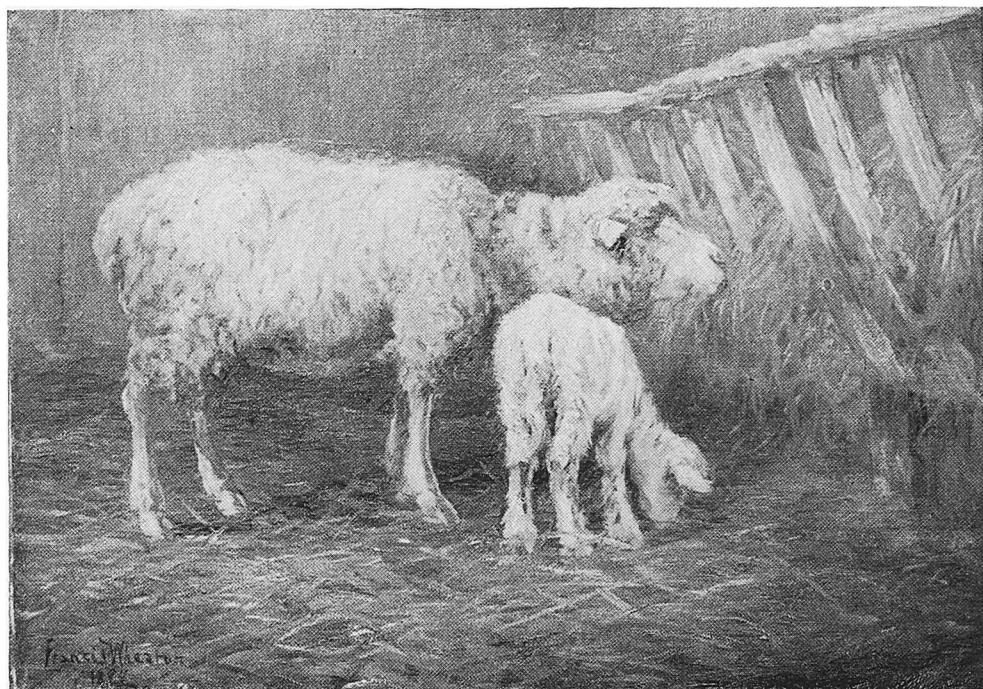
A HAPPY FAMILY



IN THE CORNER OF THE FIELD

taken as a compliment, but it is an observation I will venture to make, that of all the domestic animals, sheep and dogs have the closest resemblance to human beings in their faces. Some may think that cats, also, ought to be added to the list.

This may explain to us why pictures in which these animals play a chief part are more interesting than pictures of cows and horses. We sel-



A SHEEP AND HER LAMB



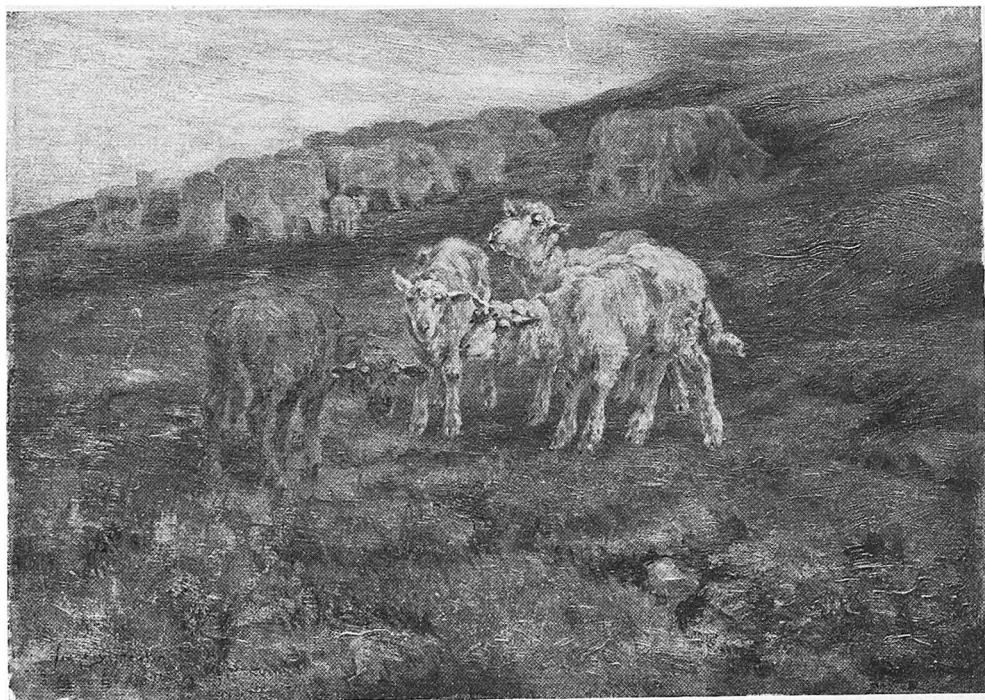
A STUDY OF THE INTERIOR OF THE SHEEP-SHED

dom see a group of horses painted: the horse in fact is a very inartistic animal, and the new scientific way of painting him, devised by Mr. Muybridge and practiced by Mr. Remington, makes him a hideous and ungainly object. Cows and oxen on the other hand easily lend themselves to majestic treatment, to broad massing of light and shade, and to rich harmonies of color; as Emerson said of Daniel Webster, they make a fit feature in the landscape.

Dutch painters knew how to make delightful cabinet-pictures of cattle: as a rule, however, these large animals look best on a large canvas, while Charles Joeque and Mr. Wheaton show us how well sheep and lambs are suited to a smaller kind of pictures suitable for the home-walls.

Francis Wheaton has a variety in his subjects and his way of treating them that is not common. In his "On the Brink" and study for "The Flocks Descending" there is large feeling, that, in the latter picture amounts almost to grandeur, yet in "Their First View of the Cold World" there is a decided sense of humor yet free from caricature—that dangerous snare to the animal-painter. In "Wow! but it blows!" and "Please let us in out of the wet!" the artist touches a note of pathos and sympathy. There is a playful element in some of the smaller pictures, as, for instance, in "A Study of Lambs and Sheep" and "The Peace-maker," while in "A Sheep and her Lamb" and "The Interior of a Sheep-shed" the artist shows that he can make attractive a simple piece of portraiture, suggesting all the pleasant accompaniments of pastoral life.

Take Mr. Wheaton's work as a whole and he seems to me to deserve an honorable place among the animal-painters who have devoted themselves to chronicling the characters and fortunes of the sheep.



NOT OF THEIR "FOUR HUNDRED"